

## Northern Powerhouse Rail Director on the next steps for the programme that will help level up the UK's economy

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Last month Transport for the North called on the Government to commit to rapid transport investment to help rebuild and transform the North of England's economy post-Covid-19.

The letter, penned by the statutory transport body's Chief Executive Barry White – in partnership with the North's political and business leaders – outlined 13 key areas that will kickstart the region's economy, both in the short and long term. From changing ticketing on public transport and launching low carbon pilot schemes, to speeding up delivery of road and rail improvements and accelerating Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR)

Tim Wood, Director of NPR at Transport for the North, explains to [railbusinessdaily.com](https://www.railbusinessdaily.com) the role the programme can have in levelling-up the UK's economy and looks at the next year and beyond for the scheme:

“At present major rail infrastructure programmes are arguably receiving more government attention than

ever before.

This week's post-Covid-19 recovery plan announcements from the Prime Minister show a continued commitment to the levelling up agenda, which is welcome news for our region with vital infrastructure projects in the North referenced, but in addition to that, it proves just how important rail infrastructure programmes are going to be in getting the UK's economy back on track.

Getting the go-ahead on certain schemes is good news, but they form part of a bigger picture for improving connectivity across the North. Those road and rail projects must be supported by commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 in full, as well as by other proposals outlined by Northern leaders in Transport for the North's letter to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps MP.

NPR will be the region's single biggest transport investment since the Industrial Revolution over two hundred years ago. Through a series of new lines and interventions, the project will radically improve capacity and journey times across the North's rail network, delivering a transformed system to unlock the region's full economic potential.

Enhanced connectivity, coupled with 35,000 extra seats each hour at peak times between key cities, will allow the North to operate as a single economy. That amalgamation of economic centres results in a multi-billion-pound growth to the economy, creates thousands of better-quality jobs and drives regeneration in cities and towns.

During this period of uncertainty it has been muted that rail passenger numbers may remain low, but it's important to remember that we are currently in the midst of an economic downturn, which indicates the importance of public transport to our economy, while also remembering that the long-term trend on our railways has been one of significant growth.

Poor infrastructure has suppressed the North's economic potential for decades and acted like a straightjacket to constraint its growth, the current snapshot should not dampen the appetite to deliver the much-needed rail capacity across the network, through a programme that can truly transform the North and play a key part in rebuilding the UK's economy.

Work continues to move at pace on NPR and the Strategic Outline Case – the document that outlines the reasons why the scheme should be delivered – is set to go before Transport for the North's board in March 2021, before being submitted to the Government.

Following this we will start work on the programme's Outline Business Case, looking at proposals, chosen concepts and intricacies of the project in finer detail but, and let me be clear on this, we will have spades in the ground by the mid-2020s.

As we continue to make the case for NPR the programme develops and grows, so too do the demands of the project. We recently awarded the NPR programme support contract to MACE, who over the next year will support the NPR team in project controls, project management, stakeholder management and commercial support. Furthermore, engineering and design company Atkins was awarded the programme's infrastructure development partner role.

Looking ahead at the next 12-months, I'd anticipate that we will be undertaking ground surveys on certain corridors to understand more about ground conditions and associated costs, while also looking to develop early station solutions.

It is also important that we look for synergies between NPR and other railway projects so that we can start to future proof the railway for the huge upgrades that lie ahead, such as ensuring that signalling systems will be compatible with those required for NPR.

And we will need the wider railway industry to invest much more in skills and apprenticeships to ensure we develop and retain the knowledge base to allow us to build and run a world-class Northern railway network."

*Tim Wood, Northern Powerhouse Rail Director, Transport for the North*